The Kingdom Within: Jesus as a Teacher of Transformation

Who is my neighbour someone asks - everyone, says Jesus in a memorable story likely invented on the spot to perfectly illustrate an answer that simple words could not. Should we stone this adulterous person or not, someone asks. Jesus does not decide, but invites them to see their own weaknesses in the woman in front of them. A remarkable teacher generating symbols and parables on the spot and with total precision, accurately reading people and situations, and trusting that the ideal answer would arise for whoever presented themselves, at the very moment.

Most of Christianity insists on the unique Godhood of Jesus as a person of the trinity, as a personal and equal face of God alongside the Father and the Holy Spirit. And yet he never claimed such things himself. Jesus himself did not claim to be the one and only son of God. He did not claim to have been personally present at the beginning of creation and gave no indication that he would return to pass judgement near the end of it. He did not claim that his crucifixion would save all of humanity from original sin, or confirm that he was the anticipated Messiah, come to fulfil prophecy. His core teachings, remarkably lucid and accessible, are not significantly different from the teachings of many other realised masters, including figures such as the Buddha or Guru Nanak.

Imagine Jesus, two thousand years ago, a human being arriving at the fullest possible spiritual realisation, just as the Buddha had done 500 years previously. What could either of these awakened teachers do but channel their wisdom, beyond any human conceptual understanding, into the culture of those they were teaching. For Jesus that meant channeling his message into belief structures and concepts his Jewish followers could understand. Relative truth, and a path towards absolute truth, is all any teacher can offer the rest of us, immersed as we are in concepts as in the air we breathe. Absolute wisdom, restricted by the limited capacity of the students' framework and translated for their benefit. Even then the translated version is only partially understood, and yet becomes solidified, a system of beliefs, and the system then mistaken for the message. The fiery molten gold of living transmission is poured into the only receptive mold available, and then the shape is mistaken for the gold itself.

This is the Jesus I see when I read the Gospels: a mind beyond concept pointing to the moon with the only tools available: concepts themselves. The language, history, metaphor, and culture of first-century Palestine.

The concepts became frozen over time, hardened and then defended, and the living thing that animated them is lost inside. It is said of the Buddha that on reaching enlightenment he did not

immediately see a way to teach his nonconceptual understanding to conceptual beings. And then people arrived, situations unfolded and the teachings just happened, not ultimate perfect truth, because such a thing would be ungraspable, but a provisional and relative one, presented as a path towards the ultimate, a path that the student must walk themselves. Jesus presented a translation of his mind into the language and framework of his students to reveal a path toward sacredness and liberation, a living method of transformation, not a fixed and eternal religion. Yet much of mainstream Christianity has moved away from that direct transmission, greatly influenced by Paul, the replacement apostle who never met Jesus in person, and therefore never stepped foot upon the path the teacher was creating in the flesh.

In the Vajrayana schools of Buddhism it is almost universally understood that you need a living guru to walk the path. You need the feedback, the transmission and the personal guidance of one who has already arrived. It is equally understood that relating with a non-human guru, someone from the past who has left this earth and who you never personally met, is more likely to be a conversation with your own ego than with your inherent wisdom. Paul did not receive the transmission of the living teacher, and yet has influenced the religion of Jesus Christ more than anyone else, arguably including Jesus himself.

“I am the way, the truth and the life.” These words have been used to justify exclusion, persecution and even domination. And yet spoken by a living teacher to his living students they mean something precise and intimate. For the disciple, the teacher literally is the only way, not because no other true path exists anywhere in the universe, but because this is the channel through which the wisdom of reality is revealing itself to them, personally, here, now. Of course that teacher is the only way for them. That is what it means to be a spiritual teacher.

Jesus was not presenting himself as the unique incarnation of the only Son of God. That came later. He was simply teaching a path to students he chose on the spot, by direct perception — the most alive people in the room, recognised immediately for what they already were. “The works that I do, you shall do also — *and greater works than these*”. Jesus said this to his disciples. Greater than the works I am doing, you can do. It is almost impossible to square this sentence with the doctrine of unique divine status. A teacher who believed himself to be the one unrepeatable intersection of God and humanity does not tell his students they can equal his own realisation and perhaps even surpass it. A teacher transmitting a path does. It’s not even ambiguous.

His disciples were learning to walk a path to that accomplishment. The apostles began performing miracles. Peter, the most promising of them, even walked on water — briefly, until he lost his nerve, and hesitation pulled him under. This detail is extraordinary if you sit with it. Jesus did not say: watch what I alone can do. He said come and do what I can do, and for a moment at least, Peter was doing it.

Rather than a teacher proclaiming his own uniqueness, this is the behaviour of a teacher transmitting a way of accomplishing. Jesus was not producing followers of faith, but was instructing true practitioners. Though Jesus did not deny being the Messiah he also did not confirm it. In his exchange with Pilate he is asked are you the Son of God? It is one of the most carefully answered questions in all of religious literature. Jesus does not say yes. He does not say no. He says: these are your words. Not an evasion — a precision. Because the honest answer was neither confirmation nor denial. It was: yes, I have become the Son of God, as any of us could.

If we want to understand Jesus the most direct route is to pay close attention to his recorded words. Not the doctrines constructed around him and after the event, but the words themselves.
“The Kingdom of God is within you”. Not above you, not waiting for you, not conditional on belief or baptism or doctrinal adherence. Within you now. In you, in the person next to you, in any of us.

This single sentence, if taken seriously, restructures everything. It is not the statement of a man asking to be worshipped. It is the statement of a teacher pointing his students back toward themselves — a long way from councils debating the metaphysical substance of the trinity under the supervision of a Roman emperor.

“Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect”. Not: admire God's perfection from a respectful distance. Not: accept your fallen nature and seek forgiveness. Become it. The instruction is direct and assumes the capacity is already there, waiting to be uncovered in every moment, rather than a promise to be given in a future after-life.

“You are gods”. Jesus says this directly, quoting the Psalms and applying it without hesitation to the people standing in front of him. Not: you are sinners who might, through my sacrifice, be granted a relationship with the divine. You are gods. Present tense. Already. The parallels with the core messages of the contemplative traditions of the East are unmistakable. Become children of God as I am the child of God. Become who you already are.

The man who said the kingdom of God is within you had become the second person of an abstract trinity. The path had become a creed. The living transmission had become an institution. And the price of entry was no longer a willingness to transform but an agreement to believe.
None of this happened through malice. It happened through the ordinary human need to preserve, to organise, to defend, to make sense of loss. The teacher was gone. The concepts were all that remained. And slowly, inevitably, the concepts were mistaken for the gold itself.

Nobody has hidden this. It's all in the texts. It's all in the historical record. The seams are visible to anyone who looks at them directly without assuming their meaning in advance. Before Abraham was, I am. Not I was — I am. Present tense. Eternal now. This is not a biographical claim or a proof of divinity. This is the statement of someone pointing at something they are living — an awareness so present, so undivided, that the ordinary categories of time have ceased to apply. Any serious contemplative tradition would recognise it immediately.

This is the teacher that the religion of Christianity was built around. This is what got frozen inside the doctrine, the creed, the institution. It did not disappear. It was never destroyed. It is still there in the words, patient and unchanged, available to anyone willing to ask the obvious questions and sit with what the answers reveal.

The kingdom of God is within you. It always was. Jesus said so.

About the Author

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Publication Information

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